

Email guidance

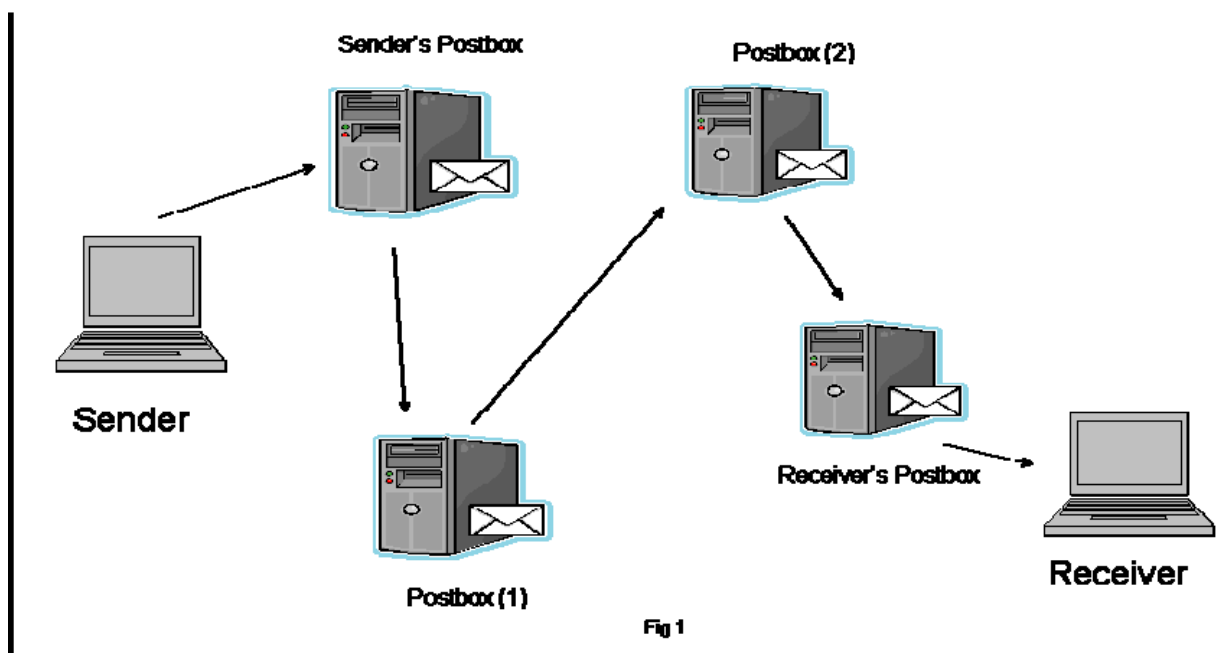
The security of email

There are a number of potential risks when using email of which users should be aware. This is a non-technical (and very simplified) explanation of some of the confidentiality risks which exist.

Issues with email

When you send an email message, the message is sent in clear text, so anyone can read the content.

It is unlikely that the message you send will go straight to the computer from where it will be read. The message will be sent to a computer nearer to its final destination like a sequence of post boxes. Each time the email goes through a post box, a copy remains in the post box. Because of the way the internet works, it is impossible to know how many post boxes the e-mail will go through on its journey. See figure 1.



In figure 1, the message remains in post boxes (1) and (2) until the owners of those post boxes delete the message, even if the sender and receiver delete the message. So anyone who gains access to the post box has access to your email message.

Many email systems will also send your username and password at the start of your with the contents of your email.

There are other risks including:

- Email may be sent to the wrong address by any sender or receiver
- Email is easier to forge than handwritten or signed papers

- Email can be intercepted, altered, forwarded or used without detection or authorisation
- Email delivery is not guaranteed

These are potential problems of which you should be aware, however, email is convenient and used by millions of people every day.

Advice to staff and patients

- Email has been likened to sending a post card. Our advice is do not put anything in an email if you are concerned about someone else seeing it.
- There is no guarantee of delivery, or delivery time, when using email so do not use it in cases of emergency.
- It is your responsibility to follow up with the practice if you have not received a response to your email within a reasonable period of time.
- If you have asked the practice to communicate with you via email it is your responsibility to advise the practice of any change of email address. You may withdraw your consent for the practice to communicate with you via email at any time.
- You should be aware that if you share your computer it may be possible for other people to be able to see emails you have sent, or sites you have visited on the internet, as your computer keeps a record of these.
- To protect against viruses and SPAM we ask that attachments are not included within emails to the practice, unless the recipient has arranged this and is expecting to receive one. If we suspect your email contains these, we may delete it without opening to prevent any damage to the practice systems and services.